

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



June 10, 2009

Washington State Building Code Council
128 10th Avenue SW
Olympia, WA 98504-2525

Dear Council Members:

In the update of the building code this year, we would like the Building Code Council to not adopt the International Code Council 2009 recommendations to require residential fire sprinkler systems in new one- and two-family homes and town houses. We are opposed to any change in the law that would allow for mandatory fire sprinklers in homes.

Voluntary Installation of Fire Sprinklers

We believe fire sprinklers should remain a voluntary option for the following reasons:

- Installation adds significant additional cost to housing. As legislators, we are constantly hearing about the need for affordable housing. Requiring fire-sprinkler systems will increase the cost of housing. Fire sprinklers are not just a one-time cost -- homeowners pay for the installation of the system, to upgrade and maintain the water meters, for increased monthly water service fees, for additional insurance costs, and for system maintenance costs.
- If the system is installed incorrectly or residents fail to maintain the systems, the systems can leak, leading to mold growth which can be a more insidious health risk than the actual chance of a fire in the home.
- The Fire Sprinkler Task Force was told that Washington law requires the design and installation of Level 1 residential sprinklers to be approved by the Office of the State Fire Marshal, but only 11 out of 39 counties had a fire marshal at the time. In these economic times, new money to add additional fire marshals is unlikely. Government officials do a disservice to the people of Washington if they adopt new requirements knowing that there are not sufficient personnel to allow the people to comply with the new rules.
- Water purveyors have concerns that fire sprinkler systems create dead ends that can jeopardize the water quality of the whole system. We are concerned that requiring fire sprinklers may jeopardize the infrastructure of the water systems when the water companies

are not in a position to make upgrades to the systems. Any policies adopted should acknowledge the differences of the water system infrastructure such that preserving water quality is the priority for each community.

- Most private wells may not be able to support a fire sprinkler system, so those homes on wells with insufficient capacity should not be required to install a system.
- If the local water system cannot provide adequate water capacity, then fire sprinklers should not be required. Water is a basic necessity, while fire sprinklers are a luxury.
- Many individuals choose to build their own homes instead of buying a home from a developer as a cost-savings mechanism. In a free country, we feel individuals should be able to choose to not include a fire sprinkler in the homes they build for themselves.

Recommendations in the alternative to voluntary systems statewide

If you choose to authorize any mandates, the following qualifications should be considered for incorporation in the legal directive to ensure reasonableness in application.

- Only allow such regulations where there is a fire marshal that has sufficient staff to adequately administer the requirements.
- Only apply the regulations where the water systems can support the additional burden of the requirements with no or minimal upgrades. If a water purveyor cannot obtain funding or financing, the community should not have to enforce fire sprinkler mandates until funding is put in place and upgrades completed.
- Allow individuals that are building their own home to not have to put in sprinklers.
- Draft regulations to be flexible taking into account the different communities' needs and infrastructure capacity. Rural communities should not have to install new water lines just so homes can have fire sprinklers. Homes not connected to water systems should not be forced to connect to systems just so that the home can have a functioning fire sprinkler.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Jan Angel
Representative
26th District



Judy Warnick
Representative
13th District



Shelly Short
Representative
7th District